

'MYSTERY' TUNNELS BUILT BY SCIENTIST 'MERELY AS PASTIME'

Exercise Sole Motive in
10-Year Work, H. G.
Dyar Says.

SUBTERRANEAN MAZE UNDER HIS PROPERTY

German Spy and Rum-Cache
Theories Continue to
Enthrall Public.

Harrison G. Dyar, an entomologist in the Smithsonian institution, last night admitted to a Post reporter that he constructed the labyrinth of tunnels in the rear of Pelham courts which, since they were uncovered two days ago, have caused the wildest speculations as to their origin and use.

Mr. Dyar made the admissions while eating his dinner at his home, 804 B street southwest. His story, which clears the baffling tunnel mystery, was told in a matter of fact way in the presence of his wife and son. It was briefly and modestly told.

Throughout the narration one could sense the romance of it—this meek, mild-mannered scientist devoting his time and study to butterflies and moths in a government office in the day and secretly digging underground passage ways in the evenings.

"Did It for Exercise."

But the motive? What actuated this elderly man of none too robust body to dig deep into the earth, constructing a maze of underground tunnels? He explained with a twinkle in his eye.

"I did it for exercise," he said. "Digging tunnels after work is my hobby. There's really nothing mysterious about it."

At this juncture Mrs. Dyar, the scientist's wife, broke into the conversation.

"The doctor did it," she said, "just as some other man passes his time after office hours playing golf."

Mr. Dyar proceeded to blast many theories which have been advanced concerning the tunnels in the rear of 1510 Twenty-first street northwest and Pelham courts on P street between Twenty-first and Twenty-second streets.

He began work on the tunnels, he said, in 1905 or 1906. At that time he and his family resided at 1510 Twenty-first street. He devoted most of his spare time to the work. It fascinated him, and when he finished one stretch of an underground passage he would start on another, until his back yard was a maze of tunnels. He kept at it until 1915, when he moved out West.

Worked for 10 Years.

Mr. Dyar said he worked on the tunnels for about 10 years, but, he asserted, he kept them within the bounds of his own property. He declared that stories that the tunnels extend to Twenty-second street, and even to Rock Creek park, are not true. At one stage of his queer pastime, he admitted, he thought of running one of the passages under an alley to a small tract of land on the other side which he owned, but he never carried out this plan.

The scientist-tunnel maker said he also owned the house at 1512, which was next door to his residence, and the ground on which Pelham courts now stand. After he had disposed of his interests he went West for a brief stay, and when he returned to Washington he moved to his present residence at 804 B street southwest.

The supposition that Germans, possibly spies, made use of the tunnels in the war was not dispelled by Mr. Dyar's admissions. The fact that German newspapers dated 1917

DIGGER OF "MYSTERY" TUNNELS



Photo John Howard Laine.

HARRISON G. DYAR,
Entomologist, who dug the underground passage in the rear of
Pelham Courts for exercise.

CONTINUED ON EIGHTH PAGE.

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CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE.

were found in one of the passageways indicates the tunnels had been entered after Mr. Dyar had moved from Twenty-first street, in 1915.

Mr. Dyar at first was reluctant to discuss his strange handiwork which, when uncovered, created such a mystery that theories that the tunnels had been used as a meeting place for German spies in war days were given as much attention as the police theory that they were the rendezvous of bootleggers. It had been suggested even that the labyrinth was the workshop of a gang of counterfeiters.

"Playground" for Son.

"No," chuckled Mr. Dyar. "The theories are all wrong. You have solved the mystery all right. I dug the tunnels. I did it for exercise. My son, Otis Dyar, who is now a man and married out in California, was a little boy when I began to dig. He used to play in the tunnels.

"In fact," he continued, "other boys played in the tunnels and while they didn't annoy me they became somewhat of a nuisance to some of the neighbors. Complaints were made and I recall on one occasion Detective O'Brien investigated.

"Another time, I recall, a policeman came snooping around to look into the tunnels. I played a little joke on him. I put a clock back in the tunnel and when the policeman heard it ticking he must have thought it a time clock on an infernal machine or a smuggler's den or something."

Contractors and engineers who have viewed that part of the labyrinth which has been opened declare the bricklaying and construction of the passages generally the work of an expert artisan.

"I'm not a bricklayer," Mr. Dyar said, with a laugh. "My business is with mosquitoes, moths and butterflies. I just laid the bricks on evenly; that's all."

Mr. Dyar drew a rough sketch of the neighborhood, showing the course of his tunnels. There were four entrances before they were closed, he said. He built a little house over one of the entrances, he added; but when he moved, the new owner razed it.

He estimated the tunnels ran less than 200 feet, including the turns. He recalled in one place he had dug down to a depth below the level of most of the passageway. Here, he said, he had constructed a ladder of pipes set in concrete.

Sketched Map Is Accurate.

Reporters for The Post again last night inspected that portion of the tunnel which had been reopened. It was just as Mr. Dyar had described. Its position with relation to the house and the alley were exactly as he had indicated on the map he had drawn. The ladder, made of pipes, also was there.

Mr. Dyar said he knew nothing of the German newspapers which were found in the tunnel and which gave rise to the rumor that perhaps German spies had occupied the underground place. He pointed out that they were dated in 1917, two years after he had moved from the Twenty-first street house.

There is nothing about Mr. Dyar that would associate him with digging and tunnel making. He looks neither the part of a well digger nor a miner. His appearance, in fact, is a sure index to what he really is—a government scientist. He wears a beard which is rapidly graying to match his hair. His

frame is slight, and he is a bit stooped.

The mysterious underground passage drew large crowds again yesterday. The plot of ground where the overburdened wheels of a truck first exposed a secret passageway literally swarmed with curious persons, photographers, newspaper men, small boys, negro janitors and tenants of apartment houses who came from blocks around to explore the curious tunnels. The alley leading to the plot of ground became jammed with automobiles of every description, frantically honking horns and sounding sirens as they endeavored to approach nearer the scene of interest.

Curiosity seekers visiting the underground tunnels yesterday reported, in some instances, that they were charged 50 cents to explore the interior. One couple said \$5 had been demanded of them. Police are unaware of the identity of those extorting money, but are making an investigation.

In order to restrain the constantly increasing crowd, it was found necessary to place policemen on guard outside the entrance of the tunnels. Curious persons continually tried to evade these guards and get into the passageway, and were only prevented from so doing with extreme difficulty. Before the arrival of police the underground caves appeared to be in danger of falling in a second time because of the weight of several hundred persons.

The turf in all directions was pulled to pieces by amateur explorers, who employed several industrious but fruitless hours in digging up other sections of the neighborhood with pickaxes and shovels.

Boy Leads "Explorers."

Accompanied by Bishop Hill, who discovered the tunnel, a group of newspaper men climbed down into the main tunnel, with 15-year-old Ralph Merlich, of the Pelham Courts apartments, in the lead. The boy is thoroughly acquainted with the underground labyrinth and has frequently used the caves as "bandit dens," while playing years ago with his young comrades.

To the amazement of the party, one of the principal tunnels had been filled in by some one and made temporarily impassable. Workmen were immediately put at work clearing away the debris, and later members of the exploring party were able to worm their way through to the other side. In the meantime, suspicion as to the motive for filling in the passage was rife in the neighborhood. Several rumors were current concerning a man who was observed creeping stealthily into the caves Thursday night, and who must have worked hours to block up in such an effective manner all means of ingress.

So many stories running the gamut of romance, adventure, intrigue and death center about the mysterious tunnels that it would be futile even to attempt to outline them. Suffice it to say that during a half-hour visit to the underground caves yesterday afternoon there were no less than 27 accounts explaining thoroughly both the origin and nature of the tunnel, who used it and why. Each of the stories was told by a different person; each gave an entirely different version, and each, upon investigation, was found to be inaccurate and lacking in some essential point. It was as much a mystery as ever until Mr. Dyar told his story.